How Instructional Designers Approach Conflict with Faculty

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Using a multiple case study approach, we interviewed 14 instructional designers working at different universities to explore the approaches and strategies they utilized when experiencing conflict with faculty. While past practitioner-based research has identified strategies instructional designers employ to cultivate effective and productive collaborations with faculty, there are no similar publications examining how practitioners in the field handle conflict with faculty during these collaborations. Based on an analysis of the interview data, we uncovered conflict prevention and management strategies used by instructional designers that synchronizes with three phases of a typical faculty collaboration timelines: (1) at the outset of the collaboration (2) during the collaboration; and (3) post collaboration. Results suggest an interconnectedness across the approaches and strategies. This article concludes with a discussion of our findings including future research and implications.

Introduction

As internal and external demands for quality online offerings continue to rise in higher education, universities and colleges are prompted to incentivize faculty to transform their on-campus teachings to the online environment (Allen & Seaman, 2017). For many higher education institutions, the COVID-19 pandemic has only accelerated the need to increase their online course offerings (Educause, 2020). Shifting from synchronous to asynchronous teaching is documented as quite challenging for faculty to achieve independently (Kampov-Polevoi, 2010; Kebritch, et al., 2017). In response, universities often partner faculty with instructional designers, who use their combined pedagogical and technological knowledge to help guide faculty through the transition to online teaching (Chao, et al., 2010; Rubley, 2016; Bawa &Watson, 2017; Richardson, et al., 2018).

Consequently, the relationships between instructional designers and faculty have garnered the interest of practitioners and researchers alike with a notable increase of studies over the past seven years (Chen & Carliner, 2020). This growing body of literature has provided many useful strategies about how instructional designers and faculty develop effective

and productive relationships to collaborate (Pan, et al., 2003; Campbell, et al., 2007; Pan & Thompson, 2009; Rubley, 2016; Bawa &Watson, 2017; Richardson, et al., 2018). Surfacing from these studies are indications of tension and, on some occasions, episodes of conflict between instructional designers and faculty (Bawa & Watson, 2017; Castro-Figueroa, 2009; Halupa, 2019; Richardson, et al., 2018; Rubley, 2016). For instance, in a survey of instructional designers and faculty, Rubley (2016) found tensions between the instructional designers and faculty to be centered on differences over "who is the pedagogical expert", "perceptions of the value of technology" and each other's role within the relationship (p. 24-25). While these differences begin to uncover potential causes of conflict, what remains largely unexamined is how instructional designers approach conflict when it arises with faculty. This study seeks to fill this gap.

Collaboration & Conflict

Professional collaborations have the potential to produce multiple benefits within the workplace (Lawson, 2004) and, as a result, are becoming increasingly commonplace across most professions (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). Collaborating with others has been a routine function of the instructional design profession from the beginning (Keppell, 2001; Reiser, 2001). In their review of the literature on the working relationship between instructional designers and faculty, Chen & Carliner (2020) found these relationships commonly characterized as a collaboration despite a lack of clarity on the specific elements of what makes the relationship collaborative. One exception is that collaborations are commonly conceptualized to only exist when there is shared interdependence between two stakeholders (D'Amour, et al., 2005; Lawson, 2004; Levin, 2012). In other words, two or more stakeholders will find themselves in a collaboration when each party is unable to achieve an identified goal or task independently. The interdependent relationship between instructional designers and faculty has been linked to a shared goal of creating high quality learning for students with the end product ranging from the digitization of a particular component of a course to an entire course being moved online (Pan, et al., 2003; Morrison, et al., 2004; Richardson, et al., 2018).

While interdependence is a critical component of collaborations, it is also found to be a common element associated with conflict (Donohue, 1992; Hocker & Wilmot, 2017; Northouse & Northouse, 1998; Wall & Callister, 1995). Professionals may desire conflict-free collaborations, but conflict management scholars argue this is not a realistic expectation since conflict is considered a ubiquitous human experience (Donohue, 1992; Hocker & Wilmot, 2017; Rahim, 2010; Tjosvold, 2008). Furthermore, Tjosvold (2008) states "conflict can be highly constructive, indeed, essential to teamwork and organizational effectiveness" (p. 19). De Dreu & Weingart (2003) propose, without some conflict, collaborators "might not realize that inefficiencies exist" in their efforts (p. 741). Experiencing opposition from subject-matter experts (SMEs), including faculty, is not a new phenomenon for instructional designers (Wedman, 1989; Keppell, 2001). In fact, Wedman (1989) cites faculty's "resistance" to the instructional design process even prior to the advent of educational technology in higher education. Although each university system can differ organizationally, faculty and instructional designers' shared goal of content transformation is what van de Vliert & De Dreu (1994) identify as "positive goal interdependence". van de Vliert & De Dreu (1994) find these types of conflicts are more likely to be able to be managed constructively. Donohue (1992) adds that constructive conflict tends to "bolster interdependence" between parties (p. 8). Thus, if approached productively, conflict between instructional designers and faculty has the potential to be constructive and yield stronger interdependence between the two parties.

Instructional design skills: Signposts for approaching conflict with faculty

The necessity to develop a versatile skill set is already familiar to instructional designers and these professional skills are consistently reviewed and updated through both research and practice (e.g., IBSTPI, 2012; Sugar, 2014; Wakefield, 2012). Examining the existing literature reveals a wide-range of skills that provide a starting point for instructional designers and how they approach conflict. Based on the review, three specific instructional design skills that are interconnected with conflict management strategies emerged and these are explored next (Donohue, 1992; Rahim, 2010; Wall & Callister, 1995).

Interpersonal Skills

Instructional designers continuously report that possessing strong *interpersonal communication* skills are amongst the most essential skills for effective work with faculty (Bawa & Watson, 2017; Campbell, et al., 2007; IBSTPI, 2012; Keppell, 2001; Kenny et al., 2005; Ritzhaupt & Kumar, 2015; van Leusen, et al., 2016; Wakefield et al., 2012). Interpersonal communication skills encompass a wide range of skills and a number of these skills appear in the literature. In a study of the interpersonal communication skills utilized by experienced instructional designers with faculty, van Leusen et al (2016) identify eight distinct types of skills: "active listening, paraphrasing, summarizing, open questioning, closed questioning, addressing faculty's questions, and informal conversation" with "open questioning" and "informal conversation" being the most frequently observed (p. 255). In a separate study, the overwhelming majority of instructional designers interviewed by Ritzhaupt & Kumar (2015) identified interpersonal communication skills as "far more important than technical skills, because technologies can be learned on the job" (p. 59). The International Board of Standards for Training, Performance and Instruction (IBSTPI, 2012), an organization that guides instructional design professional standards, identify several skills associated with interpersonal communication: write and edit messages that are clear, concise, and grammatically correct; deliver presentations that effectively engage audiences and communicate clear messages; use active learning skills, solicit, accept and provide constructive feedback; present written and oral messages that take into account the type of information being delivered and the diverse backgrounds roles, and varied responsibilities of the audience; and use effective questioning techniques (p. 3-7).

Adaptability

 Instructional designers' *adaptability* is also recognized as an important skill and is exemplified through the use of various design models, keeping current with new instructional technologies and modifying pedagogical strategies for different learning situations (Bawa & Watson, 2017; IBSTPI, 2012; Keppell, 2001; Morrison & Anglin, 2009; Rubley, 2016). Researchers also find adaptability to be an essential skill for instructional designers to utilize as they communicate and build relationships with others (Bawa & Watson, 2017; Fortney, 2013; Halupa, 2019; Richardson, et al., 2018; Ritzhaupt & Kumar, 2015). In terms of communicating, instructional designers need to be able to tailor their messages to diverse audiences (Ritzhaupt & Kumar, 2015). Richardson et al. (2018) find instructional designers identify "adaptability through open mindedness and flexibility" as one crucial component to establishing productive relationships with faculty (p.17). When collaborating with faculty, Halupa (2019) describes the importance that instructional designers can adapt:

> Instructional designers must adjust and adapt to the various levels of expertise and experience. If a designer treats a novice faculty member as an experienced one, there are likely to be issues. Consequently, if a designer treats an experienced faculty member as if he/she does not know anything about online course development, this can cause resentment (p. 63).

Bawa & Watson (2017) encapsulates the skill of adaptability for instructional designers in their findings which used the acronym and metaphor, "Chameleon" (i.e., Communication, Humility, Adaptability, Mentorship, Engagement, Looping, Empathy, Oscillating, Networking).

Problem Solving

In an instructional design professional setting, *problem solving* tends to refer to instructional designers' ability to help solve instructional problems within the instructional design process (Ertmer et al., 2008; Jonassen, 2004; Morrison, et al., 2004) and is commonly cited as a key competency for instructional designers (Fortney & Yamagata-Lynch, 2013; Kenny et al., 2005; Wakefield et al., 2012). However, in some instances, problem-solving seems to describe instructional designers' conflict resolution. For example, Wakefield et al., (2012) describe the instructional designers' role as "planner and problem solver" to mean resolving both "client concerns quickly" and "strategic conflicts in the design and development of curriculum suggesting win-win conflict resolutions" (p. 3130). More direct references to conflict resolution appear in the literature. In Campbell et al (2007) study, instructional designers specify "explicit conflict resolution" as a skill set needed when working with faculty in higher education (p. 26). The IBSTPI (2012) also finds "effective negotiation and conflict resolution" as advanced level communication skills instructional designers need to

possess. Northouse and Northouse (1998) state, "if conflict is managed in effective and productive ways, the result is a reduction of stress, an increase in creative problem solving. . ." (p. 225).

Collectively, possessing strong interpersonal communication, adaptability and problem-solving provides instructional designers a useful foundational base for use in approaching conflict. As a result, instructional designers may find themselves in a better starting position to approach conflict than professionals in other settings. Learning more about how instructional designers approach conflict with faculty is important for two of reasons. First, the working relationship between instructional designers and faculty is crucial to the overall quality and success of the courses they collaboratively design and develop, which ultimately impacts student learning (Bawa & Watson, 2017; Chao et al., 2010; Halupa, 2019). Therefore, increasing our understanding of how instructional designers approach conflict with faculty can further inform us of the impact conflict is having on this relationship. Second, workplace conflict is highly contextual and multifaceted even within a small work environment (Donohue, 1992; Lederach, 2003; Tjosvold, 2006). Gaining insight into how instructional designers approach conflict with faculty in various higher education settings will open new scholarly conversation and provide a platform for potential professional growth for instructional designers. Thus, the central research question of this study is: How do instructional designers approach conflict with faculty?

Methods

Research Design

To address the research question, this study utilized a multiple-case study design to identify strategies instructional designers find effective in managing conflict with faculty within collaborations (Yin, 2014). Using multiple cases provided researchers opportunity to examine how each individual managed conflict with faculty within their specific context and, simultaneously, garner a variety of instructional designers' perspectives (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Multiple-case analysis also allowed us to gain a more comprehensive and reliable set of common conflict management strategies used by instructional designers across cases (Yin, 2014). This can be helpful in developing a more thorough understanding of how instructional designers manage conflict with faculty.

Participants & Context

Participants for this study were recruited through the Association for Education Communities and Technologies (AECT) research email initiative and the researcher's university professional network of instructional designers during the 2020 spring semester. A recruitment email was sent asking potential participants to complete a short, pre-interview survey to provide some basic background information and their experiences of conflict with faculty during collaborations. Using a purposeful sampling method (Patton, 2015), instructional designers were recruited for the study only if they reported routine collaboration with faculty in higher education and had experienced some type of conflict during their interactions with faculty. A total of 46 instructional designers responded to the survey and, of those, 20 instructional designers met the aforementioned criteria and were invited to participate in the study. In the end, 14 instructional designers agreed to participate in the study and all were given a ten dollar Amazon gift card after completion of the interview. Participants' identities were anonymized with pseudonyms and gender, ethnicity, education, and professional experience are provided in Table 1. Additionally, on the pre-interview survey we asked each participant their confidence level in managing conflict with faculty. All participants communicated they possessed a moderate to high level of confidence in managing conflict with faculty.

Table 1

Participants' Information

Participant	Gender/Ethnicity		Education	Experience	Confidence Level in Managing Conflict
Allison	Female	Caucasian	Master's	8 years +	Moderate
Christie	Female	Caucasian	PhD	8 years +	High

Participant	Gender/Ethnicity		Education	Experience	Confidence Level in Managing Conflict
Donna	Female	Caucasian	PhD	8 years +	High
Ellisa	Female	Caucasian	Master's	5-7 years	Moderate
Frank	Male	Caucasian	Master's	5-7 years	High
Hanna	Female	Caucasian	Master's	2-4 years	High
Issac	Male	Caucasian	PhD	8 years +	High
Kenny	Male	Caucasian	Master's	5-7 years	High
Lily	Female	Caucasian	None	5-7 years	High
Michael	Male	Caucasian	PhD	5-7 years	High
Nina	Female	African American	Master's	8 years +	Moderate
Oscar	Male	Caucasian	Master's	8 years +	Moderate
Pamela	Female	Caucasian	PhD	2-4 years	Moderate
Sadie	Female	Asian American	PhD	8 years +	Moderate

Data Collection

For this study, three types of data were collected: (1) pre-interview surveys; (2) semi-structured interviews; and (3) researchers' reflective memos from both the interviews and interview transcripts. Prior to the data collection process, the researcher requested two instructional designers, who have professional experience working with faculty in higher education, pilot the pre-interview survey and semi-structured interview questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). After receiving the instructional designers' feedback, edits were made to improve the clarity of the questions. Pre-interview surveys allowed for both purposive sampling at the participant level and to establish rapport with participants before the interview (Creswell, 2015). Using the online surveying tool Qualtrics, pre-interview surveys were sent to collect demographic data, professional experience, educational background, and instructional designers' conflict experiences with faculty including their confidence levels in managing conflict with faculty. When selecting participants, maximum variation strategy was utilized to ensure we captured a diverse set of perspectives of instructional designers with different backgrounds and experiences with conflict (Creswell, 2015). For example, some participants shared more persistent conflict experiences with faculty than others.

In an effort to provide space for participants to share their experiences and conflict management strategies, individual interviews were conducted using semi-structured, open ended questions (Galletta, 2013). To further establish rapport with each instructional designer, the interviewer attempted to develop familiarity and rapport with each participant by asking questions about their day-to-day duties as an instructional designer including typical projects they collaborate on with faculty (see Appendix A). Each interview was recorded, transcribed and uploaded to NVivo for analysis. To help conceptualize the data, the interviewer composed analytical reflective memos after each interview was recorded and during the analysis of the interview transcripts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Following Shenton's (2004) recommendation, recurrent collaborative "debriefing sessions" were held between members of the research team to review data collection, discuss reflective memos and preliminary analysis of each case (p. 67).

Data Analysis

As each individual case was documented, a detailed descriptive report was developed for each case including the themes within the case and developing patterns across cases (Creswell, 2015). Each report consisted of participants' responses to the pre-interview surveys, interview transcripts, the researchers' reflective memos from the interview, and analytical feedback through debriefing sessions with research team. Constant comparative analysis was used to identify the themes across cases related to instructional designers' use of conflict approaches with faculty (Yin, 2014). Initially, one researcher open-coded interview transcripts utilizing descriptive coding techniques (Saldaña, 2015). Upon generating the first set of descriptive codes, the codes were reviewed and analyzed by members of the research team and agreement was reached regarding the direction of future data analysis. Focused coding was used and around 15

categories emerged across the data (Saldaña, 2015). After five cycles of coding and condensing of codes (Creswell, 2015), we identified a set of conflict prevention and management strategies (e.g., actively listening, fostering a personal relationship with faculty, etc.) spanning across three phases of the collaboration between instructional designers and faculty (see Appendix B). In order to ensure trustworthiness of the data, member checking was used with all participants.

Results

From the interview data, the analysis uncovered conflict prevention and management strategies coinciding with three phases of a typical faculty collaboration timeline experienced by instructional designers (1) at the outset of the collaboration; (2) during the collaboration; and (3) post collaboration (see Figure 1). Surfacing from the interview data and case reports were conflict preventative strategies that the instructional designers utilized at the outset of collaborations to avoid conflict and cultivate a sense of togetherness with faculty. The researchers refer to this strategic phase as *cultivating the collaboration*. Another set of strategies emerged that instructional designers used to *strengthen the collaboration* with faculty during their collaborations. While instructional designers identified distinct strategies for cultivating and strengthening collaborations with faculty, findings suggest the strategies the instructional design participants used were interconnected across the building of relationships with faculty, communications with faculty and various elements of the design processes. Finally, instructional designers also shared reflective strategies focused on professional and personal growth that help them improve conflict prevention and management skills leading into future collaborations with faculty.

Figure 1

Collaboration Timeline

Collaboration Timeline

At the outset	During	Post Collaboration
Cultivating the Collaboration	Strengthening the Collaboration	Reflecting Upon the Collaboration
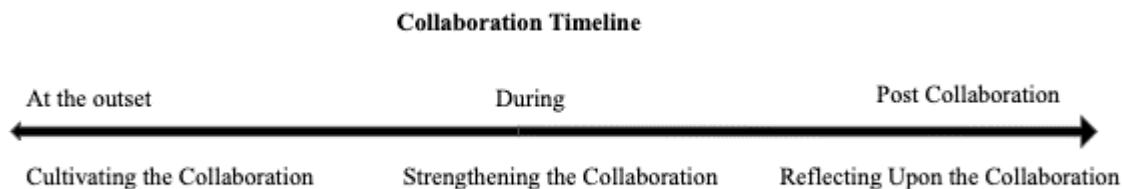
Picture showing phases instructional designers experience while collaborating with faculty

Cultivating the Collaboration
Relationship Building

In recounting collaborative experiences with faculty, instructional designers revealed they commonly enter working relationships with faculty having neither personally met nor worked with the faculty members before. While half of participants (n=7) expressed their preference to begin each collaboration with an in-person meeting with faculty, a subset of these instructional designers viewed *fostering a personal relationship* with each faculty member as a strategy they use to prevent conflict from occurring. Pamela described the goal of establishing a relationship with faculty is accomplished by getting them to see her "as a person rather than an instructional designer". Christie expanded upon this idea by describing how she attempts to meet faculty in an informal setting (e.g., "for a coffee"), which allows them to get to know each other and helps her establish a more "equitable exchange in the relationship". She added, if any conflict were to arise between her and the faculty, it is less likely that it will turn into "destructive conflict". Therefore, prior to entering into the working relationship with faculty, these instructional designers find that developing a personal bond with faculty in a non-work environment is an effective conflict prevention strategy.

Communication

Participants identified two proactive approaches centered on building strong communication foundations with faculty used to both prevent and create space to resolve conflict within collaborations. Six of the instructional designers indicated they approach each new faculty interaction with a sense of *empathy* and are prepared to *actively listen* to the faculty member. For example, Christie pointed out by agreeing to transition their class(es) online, faculty are taking on many risks such as "criticism from their colleagues" and potential "bad student evaluations". Consequently, Christie explained she always enters into faculty collaborations with an empathetic attitude towards faculty members. Donna disclosed she starts each faculty collaboration with a mindset that any "faculty resistance" is typically coming from a positive place as faculty only want what is "best for their students". Therefore, showing empathy and respect for "the naysayers", as Donna described, is a way for instructional designers to avert what they may perceive as initial conflict coming from faculty. Analogous with their expressions of empathy toward faculty were instructional designers use of active listening techniques especially during their first meeting with faculty. Both Kenny and Michael found listening to faculty helpful in gaining an understanding of any thoughts or concerns the faculty member may have heading into the collaboration. For Issac, being an effective listener also meant "to value their [the faculty] experiences and preconceptions". Kenny encouraged "repeating what they're saying so that they understand that you are comprehending" because, in his experiences, it illustrates to faculty they are being heard and understood.

Exhibiting *interest* and *curiosity* towards the faculty's teaching experiences and course content was another strategy instructional designers identified to build stronger connections with faculty. For example, Pamela described how she "familiarizes" herself with each faculty member's course content and writes down a few questions to ask during the first meeting. Then, in the initial meeting with faculty, Pamela expressed she is able to better demonstrate an authentic interest in the faculty member's subject matter and teaching methods. In addition, Christie explained how she attempts to get the faculty member discussing "what goes really well for them when they're teaching" the particular subject or course. From her experiences, she is able to tease out what excites faculty about teaching and can create a shared positive connection as they begin the collaboration.

The final strategy focused on communication shared by instructional designers was how they begin each project by *developing a customized communication plan* with each faculty member. Participants recommended learning the faculty member's preferred means of communication (e.g., in-person, email, text message, etc.) and creating an agreed upon plan of communication. Ellisa and Christie suggested obtaining the agreed-upon communication plan in writing, which they find reduces the chance of miscommunication with the faculty member. Frank added he builds flexibility into any communication plan with faculty to allow space for adjustment if the original plan does not work. Hanna summarized this process well:

> Be in close contact with your faculty members and use your best judgment to figure out the best way that you can communicate with them. Sometimes instructors will prefer phone calls over emails. Sometimes they will only do email. Work with them to develop the best kind of communication style.

Design Process

Emerging from the interview data were conflict preventative strategies instructional designers use in the beginning phase of the design process. One of the more widely used strategies identified by instructional designers (n=8) was their attempt to *create collaborative goals and incentives* with the faculty. Ellisa described one of her approaches to creating collaborative goals with faculty is to "always have an initial meeting, face-to-face, where we communicate about the goal, what my goal is, what their goal is and make sure we're on the same page in terms of our vision[. . .]" Embedded within this strategy were ways in which instructional designers try to incentivize collaborations. For instance, Kenny specified trying to "create a win-win situation" (e.g., small project milestone) for both him and faculty early on in the design process. Both Christie and Issac attempt to incentivize the design project by working with faculty on identifying a research study to collaboratively complete during the project. Christie explained "I approach design from a strength-based, you know, point of view. I am always committed to helping them get research out of the project [. . .] my mantra is make everything work twice". Thus, these instructional designers find this strategy to build positive momentum and motivation for both them and the faculty accentuates their collaboration.

Additionally, when entering new collaborations instructional designers recognized that proposing too many course design changes can overwhelm faculty and cause discord. As a result, an approach to *seek incremental change* surfaced from instructional designers interviewed. Allison expressed this notion concisely by stating "if you try to make it a perfect course, you won't get there the first time because they'll hate you". Allison suggested "do things only incrementally[. . .] introduce one active learning strategy each class or each topic". Issac echoed this sentiment and added that "change will be slow, so sort of bite-sized improvements" over different iterations of the course. These instructional designers seemed to take a more long-term approach to the course design process and sensed by taking this approach faculty were more willing to come back to them for help in preparing for future iterations of the same course.

Strengthening the Collaboration

Relationship Strengthening

When the collaboration with faculty is underway, instructional designers identified the need to *re-emphasize the interdependent relationship* they share with faculty as a method to maintain balance in the relationship. For example, Lily indicated she routinely must "loop back" to the shared interdependence between her and faculty during the collaboration. Lily conferred that it is helpful to remind faculty they are not alone, but to maintain she "can't do it all for them". Michael and Frank conveyed that they often must remind faculty, as instructional designers, they do not possess the faculty member's subject matter expertise and the member must lead the way in connecting content to student learning experiences. Accordingly, these revelations seem to highlight some of the challenges instructional designers face when transitioning from the personal relationship to the collaborative relationship with faculty.

Communication

Instructional designers offered various communication strategies to manage and mitigate conflict with faculty during collaborations. Participants identified how they attempt to communicate *clearly* and *concisely* with faculty to decrease the probability of conflict. For instance, Pamela described she always tries to make "communication clear and not redundant" and tries to not "overwhelm the faculty [member] with so many details". Pamela finds this allows her to have more meaningful communication with faculty and reduces the chance of miscommunication. Other instructional designers mentioned being clear and concise in their communications with faculty helped keep the collaborative projects on track. Ellisa delineated "I will send a quick email with a reminder of things that I need with an estimated due date[. . .]that tends to keep instructors back on track but also more generally, just developing rapport."

Nevertheless, when experiencing a communication breakdown with faculty, half of the participants (n=7) shared experiences of having to routinely *adapt* the agreed upon communication plan with faculty. Considering their experiences, Frank and Lily find taking the lead on compromising and adapting to the faculty member's communication preferences and schedule helped them alleviate pressure on faculty, thus, reducing the likelihood that conflict would arise.

Another communication strategy cited by instructional designers was more directly related to the actions taken if they sensed a conflictual tone in communication from faculty. In these instances, participants shared they would *seek clarification* from their colleagues. Ellisa described how she employed this strategy:

> If something comes across via email or communication from faculty that doesn't rub me the right way, I might seek out an external person to read those documents or interpret them. And sometimes, my understanding is, they're like, Oh, no. I think what they meant to say was this. So, sometimes getting an outsider's point of view, especially with the different personalities that we do run into.

Hanna's experiences reflected this strategy of using the resourcefulness of her colleagues by recounting "they've been hugely helpful for me whenever I have delays or issues with faculty". Therefore, participants used collaboration with their colleagues to help guide them in navigating conflict with faculty.

Design Process

When the design process is fully in progress, instructional designers identified two overlapping strategies used to avoid conflict. Building upon the idea of seeking incremental change described earlier, participants expanded on how they *prioritize design choices* as the design process is underway. Pamela best described this strategy through her observations of other instructional designers:

> *The instructional designer has a whole crazy new idea, but it will take a lot of time, then maybe it's not the best way to go . . . also considering these kinds of things, like, how much time will it take for the subject matter expert to do this change, or how much effort can they really give to this new change or new technique design.*

Instructional designers recognized proposing too much change through elaborate design choices can increase cognitive dissonance for faculty and result in tensions within the collaboration.

One of the most often cited conflict management approaches in this study was how instructional designers *demonstrate examples of design proposals* to faculty. Findings revealed a couple different aspects to this approach. First, a couple of instructional designers provide practitioner-based examples from past course designs projects. For instance, Allison recommended developing "a portfolio of good examples" to illustrate each design proposal in action. Oscar described how he used this approach: "I kind of show my work and kind of explain why my recommendation is what it is, and kind of show them how it's all connected". Second, the remaining instructional designers seemed to connect their design proposals to the existing research literature. Kenny best described this angle:

> *Faculty, to me, at least PhD faculty in higher education, respond well to having those research articles to draw from and use as examples. So the same way that they kind of require their students to critically think and go through that material, you have to approach it as they see you as a student, and you're having to convince them that you know what you're talking about, and that there is supporting information out there to back it up. That seems to get a long way, too.*

Regardless of whether practical examples or research-based examples are used, instructional designers found providing evidence-based design proposals aided in preventing conflict with faculty.

Reflecting Upon Collaborations

Several of the instructional designer participants (N=4) shared a few strategies found to be helpful in becoming better prepared to prevent and manage collaborative conflict with faculty. All these strategies were reflective in nature and utilized post-collaboration. Significantly, all the approaches shared centered around the idea of instructional designers continuously sharpening and adding to their skill-set. For instance, two of our instructional designers described how integrating scholarly inquiry into their collaborations with faculty pushes them to learn to work with various types of people (e.g., faculty and other instructional designers) and learn whether or not the course designs are working from a learning perspective. Sadie described the conflict management skills she gained while working on a publication with a faculty collaborator:

So we worked with a diagram and he was able to visualize a concept map of the things he wanted to visualize. So like, this problem-solving process really motivated me or forced me to gain more skills whenever problems emerged . . . when you're working on these different projects, people and project management and talking with publishers, this can become an implicit side of skill gaining.

Issac explained how he used scholarly inquiry in the past experiences to learn how course design choices and changes impacted student learning. Specifically, for Issac, these "collective studies" are an effective tool for "showing the results" of course design to current and future faculty in collaborations.

Other instructional designers reported the training they received outside the instructional design profession has assisted in being able to better navigate conflict with faculty. Kevin suggested his undergraduate educational

background in communications and continued pursuit of knowledge in this area allowed him to be more "well-rounded" when dealing with conflict. Likewise, Donna added additional training in "change management" provided the ability to analyze where "resistance comes from" when working with faculty.

Discussion

Analysis of the results indicate instructional designers employ a wide range of strategies to navigate conflict with faculty across three main phases of collaborations (i.e., at the outset, during, and post-collaboration). Almost all of the strategies reported by instructional designers centered more on conflict avoidance and less on how to manage instances of conflict when it arises with faculty. Specifically, participants shared how to strategize to prevent conflict with faculty through relationship building approaches, effective communication techniques and actions to take during the design process. When considering these approaches in tandem, they are interconnected and often utilized in conjunction with one another.

Many of the conflict prevention approaches described by our instructional designers were aimed at humanizing themselves in the eyes of the faculty, and concurrently meant to cultivate a sense of togetherness with faculty. When trying to nurture personal relationships and connections with faculty, participants attempted to meet faculty in informal settings with the goal of getting to know each faculty member prior to the launching of formal collaborations. This strategy is consistent with past research findings on how instructional designers' build collaborative relationships with faculty. For example, Richardson, et al. (2018) reported instructional designers found "getting to know [. . .]" faculty and making "connections with them as people [. . .]" were important in building trust and rapport within their relationships. Similarly, van Leusen, et al., (2016) observed instructional designers collaborating with faculty and found one way they built "trust and connections" with the faculty was through their "informal conversations" (p. 253).

Noticeably, participants shared several strategies seeming to convey to faculty the instructional designer's personal commitment and attentiveness to the faculty member. For instance, instructional designers reported expressing empathy and using active-listening techniques with faculty. In previous studies, instructional designers have identified empathy as an essential element in building successful collaborative relationships with faculty (Bawa & Watson, 2017) and active listening has been widely cited as a necessary skill for instructional designers (Fortney & Yamagata-Lynch, 2013; Richardson et al., 2018; van Leusen, et al., 2016). When coupled with instructional designers' efforts to show interest and curiosity toward faculty's content area and teaching experiences, collectively, these strategies can help portray instructional designers as caring and engaged professionals. Moreover, participants' approaches to incentivize their collaborations with faculty, especially through joint research endeavors, is another way instructional designers try to promote cooperation. Instructional designers' approaches to humanizing themselves and cultivate togetherness with faculty in collaborations are grounded in the hopes that faculty will reciprocate. Therefore, diminishing the likelihood that conflict will derail the collaboration. Despite all of these efforts, instructional designers still noted routinely have to re-emphasizing their interdependence with faculty at various points in the collaboration which signals these strategies do not always result in success.

Subsequently, the remaining strategies identified by instructional designers were anchored in practicality, best construed by the expression of "getting out of one's own way". More specifically, the instructional designers who participated in this study did not want to be the source of conflict, and utilized these strategies to achieve this desired goal. For instance, participants' efforts to avoid miscommunication with faculty through purposeful communications techniques, including getting a communication plan in writing, was the first representation of this idea.

The need for instructional designers to be able to communicate with clients effectively and efficiently is well documented in the literature (Bawa & Watson, 2017; Gibby et al., 2002; Klein & Jun, 2014; van Leusen et al., 2016; Wakefield et al., 2012). Even when instructional designers perceived conflict coming from faculty, they took a cautious approach and consulted their colleagues for advice. This is closely aligned with our findings of instructional designers' willingness to adapt to faculty needs in order to avert conflict, which also has been found to be an important characteristic for successful collaborations (Bawa & Watson, 2017; Halupa, 2019; Richardson et al., 2018). An

unexpected finding was instructional designers' recognition of typical steps in the design process (i.e., prioritizing design choices and showcasing examples of these suggestions to faculty) as conflict prevention approaches. This seems to indicate they may have experienced instances of conflict with faculty during these particular project phases.

Limitations and Future Research

Obtaining the perspectives and experiences of 14 instructional designer participants, this study unveiled a set of conflict prevention approaches these instructional designers utilize with faculty during collaborations. While we were only able to conduct one interview with each participant, we were able to complete 14 interviews providing a deeper range of experiences and approaches to consider and analyze. As with any research of participants' perceptions and experiences of conflict within their profession, one would anticipate some built-in limitations due to the sensitivity of the topic. For example, there were some instances notated by the interviewer where some of the participants seemed to be disinclined to expand upon the thoughts and experiences they were sharing during the interview.

Our findings seemed to uncover a potentially fertile line of future research. To start, an investigation of faculty's perceptions and experiences of conflict with instructional designers could provide perspectives of the other side of these collaborations. Also, researchers should examine how instructional designers in other workplace settings (e.g., corporate, K-12, etc.) manage conflict in collaborations. Building upon the preventative strategies identified in this study, future studies could concentrate on how instructional designers manage and mitigate conflict with faculty when it arises. While this may require a researcher mirroring an instructional designer through a collaborative project with faculty, it could provide invaluable and deeper insights into the conflict management strategies used by instructional designers.

Implications

Based on the interviews with participants, it is evident instructional designers actually spend quite a bit of time, thought, and energy trying to avoid conflict with faculty. This converges with clues from the literature (Bawa & Watson, 2017; Pan et al., 2003; Rubley, 2016; Tate, 2017), and our analysis that the potential for conflict is embedded within each phase of faculty collaboration for instructional designers. One implication is that conflict may be more pervasive within collaborations between faculty and instructional designers than originally suspected. Fortunately, many of the conflict prevention strategies shared by instructional designers were either directly connected or interconnected to the existing collaborative strategies within the literature (e.g., skills related to interpersonal communication, adaptability and problem solving). This has the potential of providing instructional designers a favorable position to managing conflict with faculty and other collaborators. However, the findings show instructional designers seem to be shouldering or, at least, feel primarily responsible for the conflict management within collaboration with faculty. To help alleviate some of this burden, universities and/or instructional design graduate programs could develop specialized training for instructional designers in conflict management strategies.

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Appendix A: Interview guide

1. In the pre-survey, you identified that you have worked as an instructional designer for (confirmed number of years from pre-interview survey). How many of these years have been in higher education?
2. Could you please describe in more detail your current role and responsibilities as an instructional designer?
3. What type of collaborative projects do you usually work with faculty?
4. From your experience, what are some effective strategies you have or you have seen being used to approach conflict in collaboration with faculty?
5. What advice would you offer to an instructional designer who is new to working with faculty when it comes to effectively managing conflict that may arise?

Appendix B

Collaborative Phases	Conflict Mitigation & Management Strategies

Cultivating the Collaboration	• Relationship Building
	  ○ Fostering personal relationship
	• Communication
	  ○ Approaching faculty with sense of empathy
	  ○ Utilizing active listening techniques
	  ○ Exhibiting interest and curiosity towards faculty's teaching experiences and course content
	  ○ Developing customized communication plan
	• Design Process
	  ○ Create collaborative goals and incentives
	  ○ Seek incremental change

Strengthening the Collaboration	• Relationship Strengthening
	  ○ Re-emphasize the interdependent relationship
	• Communication
	  ○ Communication clearly and concisely with faculty
	  ○ Adapt the communication plan (if needed)
	  ○ Seek clarification from colleagues and mentors
	• Design Process
	  ○ Prioritize design choices
	  ○ Demonstrate examples of design proposals

Reflecting Upon Collaborations	• Integrating scholarly inquiry into collaborations with faculty • Seek training outside instructional design

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